The Intersections between DORA, Open Scholarship and Equity

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In 1969, the BBC broadcast a landmark television series called *Civilisation*. It was one of the first television series to be broadcast in colour. In it, the art historian Kenneth Clark traced the rise of Western European civilisation through an examination of its art through the centuries. In an early episode he observed that there had been three or four times in history where Man had made a leap forward that would have been unthinkable under ordinary evolutionary conditions. He is thinking of the 12th Century in Europe as one of these times, when there was an eruption of architectural creativity, which created treasures like Notre Dame. He also observed that this forward leap was due to the rise of confidence in the future that is needed to push through a long-term project. Without wishing to put too much weight on it, I think we are at a similar moment in history regarding research assessment and open science.

The evolution of this opportunity that I think we face now and that this conference is discussing was identified even back in 1999 in a paper by Michael Gibbons where he was analysing the interactions between science, industry and government. He recognised back then the need for a new contract to ensure that scientific knowledge was socially robust and relevant to society. That required its production to be both transparent and participative. This paper was published before the terms ‘open access’ or ‘open science’ were in common parlance, but in fact the whole paper is infused with the idea of openness. It is the realisation of that vision that I think we are here today to try and push forward.

The ideas that Gibbons talked about have started to enter the development of public policy. There have been several key documents since then that have talked about research assessment and open science. In the beginning, and the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) was one of the first movers here, policy and recommendations around research assessment did not explicitly talk about open science. It is not really mentioned in DORA, in the Leiden Manifesto, the Metric Tide, or in the Hong Kong Principles. However, it is in more recent pronouncements and policy documents, such as in a paper for the Global Research Council, that the European Commission Scoping Report helped to set the scene for this conference. In the
UNESCO recommendations on open science⁹ that we heard about this morning, the intertwining of research assessment and open science is seen as essential. I think we need to develop a new vision in evaluating science if we are to move forward with this.

When we talk about what we value about science, and we have already heard quite a bit on this subject today, then I think it is interesting to take on board the thinking of philosopher Michael Sandel¹⁰. In a talk he gave in 2018, he primarily reflects on politics and society as it is now, but he has observed, and I think he is right to do so, the outsourcing of public policy by many governments to commercial organisations. This has been particularly intense in the 1980s in the UK and the US, but I think this is also reflected in the EU project. This has led to a diminishment of the idea of a public good, and a loss of faith in or sight of the collective responsibility for overall wellbeing. I think it is these ideas that we now want to see brought back, not just into society, but into the academy.

We have seen that what has market value in academia now is very much driven by metrics. This is an infusion of the ideas of marketisation into public policy around higher education and research. There is a legitimate demand from governments and public funders for accountability from the academy. But market value in academia has got tied up with the over over-metrication of research assessment and that has led to many unintended and harmful effects. We have a hypercompetitive environment that slows down publication and that can lead to biases in important clinical trial analyses, and we see a culture in which many academic activities are devalued. There is stress on academics as a result. There is a focus on the “what”, not the “who” or the “how” or indeed or the “why”. There is incentivisation within the system of fraud which is undermining public trust. That is something that we really need to guard against.

Within DORA we have a different vision of what research values should look like. I think these values are widely shared. We have heard many similar expressions, and one can see that this resonates very strongly with what we read in the UNESCO report. We are looking for reliable, rapidly communicated, high-quality research that transforms our understanding of the world and can change it for the better. For this, we need researchers who collaborate and feel a duty to care for their group members. We need a research system that values the people within it, cares about their quality of life and seeks out the creative vigour of diversity.

Now, this is a very grand vision. The hard part is to think about how we implement this vision. This is where I see the intersection between research assessment and open science. I do personally believe that we need to talk about how open science can
be better science. Many of the speakers today have already spoken about different aspects of this.

In the last session, we heard about preprints. I am a big fan of preprints. They lead to faster communication. They focus on the content, not the container. Open access, open data and code sharing create a global audience. They maximise a public good within and beyond the academy. They have the potential to increase the scrutiny and reliability of data. Now, there are questions about these innovations. They are not magic solutions, they are not silver bullets, and we have already heard today about questions of reliability and the misuse of preprints. Particularly, in the last session focusing on Diamond Open Access, we heard about the issue of how we need to ensure equitable access for authors. I was very encouraged by what I heard in the previous session.

Generally, and this would be the stance I think of the EC Report and the UNESCO report, open science is better for a changing world. It is making science better and more relevant to more people. In DORA, we are playing a part in that, and increasingly, although our focus is primarily on research assessment, we have to recognise that we are operating in a complex landscape and there are intersections with open science and open scholarship. Although open science is not mentioned in the DORA Declaration, our focus on recognising a broader range of contributions to the academy within research and to society resonates very much with the philosophy of open scholarship. We also have to recognise how biases that operate within research assessment are propagating historical inequities and stereotypes that still to this day exclude women. They exclude people from ethnic minorities and exclude disabled researchers from the academy. Equally, considerations of equity and inclusion interact with open scholarship because it forces us to ask who the academy is open to, and right now it is not sufficiently open to all people.

It is important to have a vision to meet these challenges, but we do have to be realistic, and we must not be naive about the pressures on the system. Pressures that have distorted our incentives and that can lead to disincentives of good practice and the difficulties with regard to time and resource pressure which the major actors need to bring to this party. We do need to interact with funders, with governments, with universities and with our researchers. We have to be very much open to dialogue, to hear their concerns about the change. Change brings many different challenges. However, at the same time, we must not lose sight of our vision, but already I hear in many of the contributions to today’s conference the willingness to roll up our sleeves and get stuck into the hard work of doing that.
DORA is very much joining in with that effort. We are a relatively longstanding organisation. We received a significant funding boost in 2017 and that has allowed us to have a much more international profile. Our funding is international, and our steering committee now is absolutely international because we know that this has to be a worldwide conversation. DORA has three priorities in its strategy: to promote the declaration and to extend the global and disciplinary reach of the declaration, but the most important one is to develop and promote best practice. We bring a very practical lens to this effort. It is not just about criticising people for misusing impact factors or other aggregate indicators. We want to be part of finding workable solutions to the problems that we face.

A summary of a few of the resources that we have been developing over the years includes briefings we produce, meetings and workshops we convene, webinars we run and articles we publish. If you look at our website, we are collating and curating a resource library of good practice from universities and organisations around the world and in collaboration with SPARC Europe\textsuperscript{11} and EUA\textsuperscript{12} we launched a series of case studies last year. I am a great believer in the philosophy that nothing succeeds like success. I think in this sector there is a great willingness to embrace open science, but a great hesitation to know how to take the first step, and we need to identify and promote those in the vanguard who are willing to experiment, and learn and share the lessons with the rest of the community so that we can all move forward together.

We are an extremely small organisation. We have two members of staff plus an intern. They are fantastic people and do a really great job for DORA, but we enhance our impact by collaborating with many other organisations, with the Royal Society on developing the narrative CV\textsuperscript{13}, for example. We recently ran a workshop looking very critically at narrative CVs, because again there are no silver bullets in this game and we must be wary of any dangers that are introduced by the reform of research assessment practices, even if the vision obviously is to make them much more robust and much more fit for purpose. We have helped develop policy in the Wellcome Trust\textsuperscript{14} and worked with the Research on Research Institute\textsuperscript{15}.

Project TARA\textsuperscript{16} is one of our latest and most exciting initiatives. It is funded by Arcadia\textsuperscript{17}, a charitable fund of Lisbet Rausing and Peter Baldwin. This is largely an infrastructure development project. The most important component of it is the development of an online dashboard with which we aim to track the adoption and implementation of responsible research assessment practices worldwide, and by doing so we hope to do an even better job of discovering and promoting those that are really embracing the reform of research assessment and open science practices to then encourage others. Ideally when this launches, and an initial version will be launched this year, we
hope that this will stimulate an enormous worldwide conversation and I very much hope that people will be banging on our doors to tell us about the good work going on in their institutions that they want us to include in the dashboard.

There is lots of work that we are doing, and we are very much open to collaboration with many other organisations, not least the EC and the good work being done here through the Paris Call. But we recognise, and we have heard some notes today, that there is resistance to this change. We have certainly seen that with the announcement of Plan S, and we have seen that with the announcement of changes and reform at the University of Utrecht, for example. We have heard that Plan S is too risky, unfair and a violation of academic freedom and Professors Poot and Mulders are obsessed with the impact factor and very concerned that it will lead to harm to Dutch science.

I think these fears are overstated and misguided, but nevertheless it is important that we hear them. I think they represent a genuine concern for the quality of science across Europe and across the world and we must be ready to enter dialogue. I believe, along with Atul Gawande, that people talking to people is still how the world’s standards change, and that is very much what we are doing here today.

Coming back to what I started my presentation with, something that represents an update and the trajectory of history that we are talking about today, a year or two ago the BBC remade the *Civilisation* series that it had first broadcast 50 years ago, but it did so in a much more open way. Rather than focusing just on Western Civilisation, the series embraced all of human civilisation and is titled *Civilisations* – plural – as a result, and was presented not just from the perspective of one white man but from a diverse range of experts, and that created much more value in the documentary series. It created a series that was richer and much more relevant to a worldwide audience. We must learn that lesson. That is the promise of open science, which we need to get to through reform of research assessment, and ultimately what we are trying to do here and what we hope to do is to create a new ‘new social contract’, to refer to Michael Gibbons’ original paper. I hope that through the Paris Call that is being announced at this conference then we can start to write that social contract.

**To go a step further**

“Despite its very young age, DORA has already gained such prominence that it is now considered the new standard for research evaluation. The declaration has been signed by over 18,000 individuals and 2,500 organizations.”
“Academic freedom is about being able to publish what you want, with freedom of conscience and expression. However, it does not necessarily mean being able to choose the journal in which one publishes, and all publicly funded research carries with it the moral responsibility to make the results of that research available to all, to maximize its impact and act in the most ethical manner possible.”

“It is difficult to ask researchers to be innovative (or not) in their work. However, it is fundamental to place the robustness of research at the forefront of evaluation.”

“We must remember that even citations based on numbers are subjective, not objective. There are biases within citation practices.”

“In the US we have noticed that there are relatively few institutional signatories, certainly universities, that have signed. Some American scholars I have talked to say they have a good system, and it is the Europeans who are obsessed with metrics. I am not sure that that is true. That is not necessarily what I hear from young American researchers. That is one of the things that we are going to explore in Project TARA. There is a role for national funding agencies here to think about the leverage that they can operate to promote good practice. Funders should not necessarily be afraid about trying to set the standard for what good research looks like.”

“If one is doing research assessment based on numbers it certainly is quick, but it is not effective. It is missing out on evaluating many other important academic activities that get discounted in a system that relies unduly on metrics. We do need to think about the workload involved because researchers are very busy. I think the narrative CV format, which is something that we have been helping to promote, is a very promising way because that provides a structured and concise way to allow individuals to give a good account of the variety of activities that they have contributed to the academy, not just their impact factors.”

“The impact factor is a good way to assess journals, but it is not a good way to assess individual papers or individual researchers. We ask for individuals and their work should be assessed and we say that they should not be assessed via a proxy that is a simplistic and often skewed number. We see that there is no real correlation between the importance that people attach to their work and the impact factors of the journals that they publish in.”
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References

15. Stephen Curry et al.